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The alleged conspiracies of conservative reformers like count Coudenhove-Kalergi and the Bilderberg Group

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Published in:
EuroVisie

Link to publication

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Unspecified

Citation for published version (APA):
de Bruin, R. (2017). Alt-right Claims that would put the Soviets to shame: The alleged conspiracies of conservative reformers like count Coudenhove-Kalergi and the Bilderberg Group. *EuroVisie*, *13*(2), 28-31.

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Download date: 16 Jun 2020

eurovisie

a publication of the study association for european studies

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Alt-right Claims that would put the Soviets to shame

The alleged conspiracies of conservative reformers like count Coudenhove-Kalergi and the Bilderberg Group.

Robin de Bruin

The mother of all modern European conspiracy theories was the idea, propagated by the Nazi leaders during the Second World War, that Nazi Germany was at war with "the Jews" in both the United States and the Soviet Union. The answer to the pressing question why American "capitalist plutocracy" and Soviet communism, by their very nature antagonistic, had allied against Germany was obvious, according to Nazi propagandists. Hitler did not acknowledge the class struggle between the propertied class and the workers. The emergence of "capitalist plutocracy" and the reaction to it, in the form of Soviet communism, were linked to "pernicious Jewish materialism". In this line of reasoning the omnipotent Jewish foe (supported by the "artificial division" of "the people" under the parliamentary system of the Weimar Republic) tried to break the natural ethnic solidarity between people of the same German "race". According to the Nazis, the Third Reich had overcome class society, and therefore global Jewry wanted

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to annihilate it. The antagonism between liberal capitalism and communism was their tool to "divide and rule". Global free trade, the gold standard and communism were seen as part of the same Jewish conspiracy for world domination.

Similar conspiracy theories, including a secret hierarchy of controlling Jewish influences, still endure - today as part of a revolt of "angry white men" against contemporary, post-1960s elites. The response to these angry theories that circulate online, show a naïve confidence in the power of politicians, namely the conviction that society could be changed overnight if only sitting politicians would want to do so. This leads to disappointment in these politicians – who apparently do not care too much for change - and to hopes for a messianic saviour.

Many of today's conspiracy theories on Twitter and Facebook accuse "cosmopolitan elites" of, for example, secretly orchestrating economic crises for political purposes. According to conspiracy theorists linked to the Alternative Right (Alt-Right) movement, political elites in the West have had a secret "cultural Marxist" agenda for more than fifty years. These elites are assumed to be subordinate to secret puppet masters who are the enemy from within in the global clash of civilisations. They would not only replace "honest capitalism" with socio-economic serfdom, but would do away with traditional values as well. Some followers of these theories argue that mass immigration to "the West", the subsequent multi-racial integration and "gender neutralism" are being promoted in predominantly "white" countries. This is intended to replace the strong, self-conscious populations of these countries with passive subjects that have been manipulated into submission.

For me as a historian, it is striking that many of today's conspiracy theories under the umbrella of "cultural Marxism" attribute imagined conspiracy theories retroactively to conservative or even reactionary organisations, groups and individuals of the past. People that actually strived for reform

> "Global free trade, the gold standard and communism were seen as part of the same Jewish conspiracy for world domination"

in order to preserve: preserve the market economy, preserve European colonial domination, preserve Christianity, preserve family values, preserve the rural areas, etc. At first sight, many of these "conservative reformers" could be regarded as kindred spirits to the sympathisers of the Alt-Right movement.

One example is the Bilderberg Group. It is accused on social media of trying to form a New World Order, made up of the leaders of banks and multi-national corporations. Some Alt-Right propagandists have accused this Bilderberg Group of trying to impose a world government and a planned economy across the globe.

However, in fact the Bilderberg Conferences started in 1954 as informal meetings of West European and American non-communist politicians, business leaders and trade union officials called together with the purpose of removing sources of friction between the United States of America and its West European military allies in the Cold War against global communism. The first Bilderberg Conference was held in hotel De Bilderberg in the small Dutch town of Oosterbeek and was organised by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands. He would be the organiser of many more Bilderberg Conferences to come. This is why the archives of the Bilderberg Group are kept at the Dutch National Archives in The Hague. Everyone has free access to these archives.

The very first question that was raised at this first Bilderberg Conference of 1954 was how to guard against developing a system of social security in western countries which eventually would destroy free enterprise. After the Second World War, Western European democracies were under pressure to provide higher levels of prosperity and social security for their citizens. States wanted to prevent their own citizens from becoming receptive to communism due to material poverty. However, most political elites despised the idea of economic planning that perhaps would bring in the totalitarian communist state power through the back door. The main question for the Bilderberg Conference was, in other words: how to maintain "economic freedom" in times of state-guaranteed social security? The accusation that the Bilderberg Group itself tried to impose a

planned economy is based on blatant misinformation.

An even more bizarre conspiracy claim that would probably even put the Soviets to shame is the theory that today's political elites in Europe, like the German right-wing Christian Democrat Wolfgang Schäuble, supported by the European Union, would encourage and welcome an "invasion" of "refugees" and "migrants" from Africa and the Middle East in order to cause a "white genocide".

Many conspiracy theorists see this alleged conspiracy as the spiritual successor of what they call the "Kalergi Plan". After the First World War, the Austro-Japanese count Richard Nicolaus Coudenhove-Kalergi, a fervent anti-communist, published his famous book Pan-Europa (1923, translated into English as Pan-Europe in 1926), which contained a plan for the political and economic unification of Europe. In Coudenhove-Kalergi's eyes the European continent, together with its overseas colonies, would have to form one large economic entity. Pan-European agriculture and industry had to be protected from cheap imported products. This European economic unity would lead to rationalisation, increased production and lower prices, whereby prosperity would become greater and more widespread. The "class struggle" would be prevented by European unity, and as a result communism would lose its appeal. Poverty, after all, was the breeding ground for communism.

According to the historian Marco Duranti, conservative elitist 'romantic internationalists' like Coudenhove looked back nostalgically to an idealised past as a basis for a new Europe that would overcome the drawbacks of

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modernity. In his recently published book, *The Conservative Human Rights Revolution* (2017), Duranti, for instance, reinterprets the origins of the Council of Europe's European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) of 1950, arguing that its conservative inventors envisioned it as a means to halt the expansion of the bureaucratic authority of the British Labour government over Britain's economy, or to safeguard the autonomy of Catholic institutions in France.

In his book on Pan-Europa, Coudenhove had written that Europe's culture was that of the 'White Race, which sprang from the soil of Antiquity and Christianity'. The reformist nature of his plan for a Pan-Europe went hand-in-hand with the maintenance of European colonial dominance around the globe. However, as the son of a Japanese mother and an Austro-Hungarian father, Coudenhove was certainly not a white supremacist. In his 1925 book *Praktischer Idealismus*, he wrote that racial groups, like the Jews, and social classes would gradually disappear in the future and that personalities would remain. Moreover, the mixing of different racial groups would replace the diversity of peoples with a variety of personalities who would look outwardly similar to the ancient Egyptian.

Today, phrases about these expectations for the future are being mixed up by representatives of the Alt-Right movement in an attempt to prove that Coudenhove, of course with the help of a Jewish banker (no effective conspiracy theory can do without antisemitism), had developed a plan for a so-called White Genocide. Earlier this year, even a former member of the Dutch Lower House for the VVD, now an adviser to Thierry Baudet's Forum for Democracy, stated on twitter that the European political response to today's refugee crisis apparently was meant to bring the aims of this "Kalergi Plan" to fruition.

The real target of conspiracy theorists is, of course, today's European Union. Federica Mogherini, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has been called the 'EU minister for White Genocide' in an article on the website altright.com. The EU's predecessors, like the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Economic Community (EEC), are depicted as instruments in the hands of sinister left-wing elites who would want to establish a planned economy. If one repeats this nonsense a thousand times, one probably starts to believe it. However, the ECSC and the EEC were basically attempts for a conservative reform of Western Europe in order to restore the West European market economy after the economic *beggar-thy-neighbour* policies of the European states in the 1930s and the war that followed it. Another goal was to maintain as much influence as possible over Europe's colonies.

> "In Coudenhove-Kalergi's eyes the European continent, together with its overseas colonies, would have to form one large economic entity."

The supporters of the Alt-Right movement see European integration as a catalyst for, not as a response to, processes of neoliberal globalisation, which they think of as a cultural and socio-economic threat. However, this does not explain why the Alt-Right movement directs its arrows to the aforementioned conservative reformers of the past. A Dutch historian, Han van der Horst, has argued that this is not despite the fact that there are some similarities, but because of it. According to Van der Horst, the New Right cannot live with the fact that outspoken conservatives like Coudenhove drew the conclusion that Europeanisation was a good idea.

I think the roots may run deeper. In many ways, today's Alt-Right, with opinion leaders like Milo Yiannopoulos, can be regarded as the mirror image of the 1960s provocative counter-culture. Partly as a result of the discontent of the 1960s, the paternalistic state that made decisions for groups of people was replaced in the 1980s and 1990s, not by direct democracy as the New Left had wanted, but by market mechanisms as conditions for individual free choice. The fact that today's neoliberal society is not as meritocratic, as we often like to think, causes resentment that has to be redirected. Lower-educated people in particular feel orphaned. At the same time, any sign of "left-wing" political paternalism is regarded as an obnoxious form of hypocrisy. Facts cannot be trusted and every claim to authority is suspect. Undermining all authority, even the authority of the New Right's kindred spirits of the past, is the heart of today's New Right revolution. ■